



ONCE UPON A TIME

(Part II)

M Choksi and P M Joshi





Nehru Bal Pustakalaya

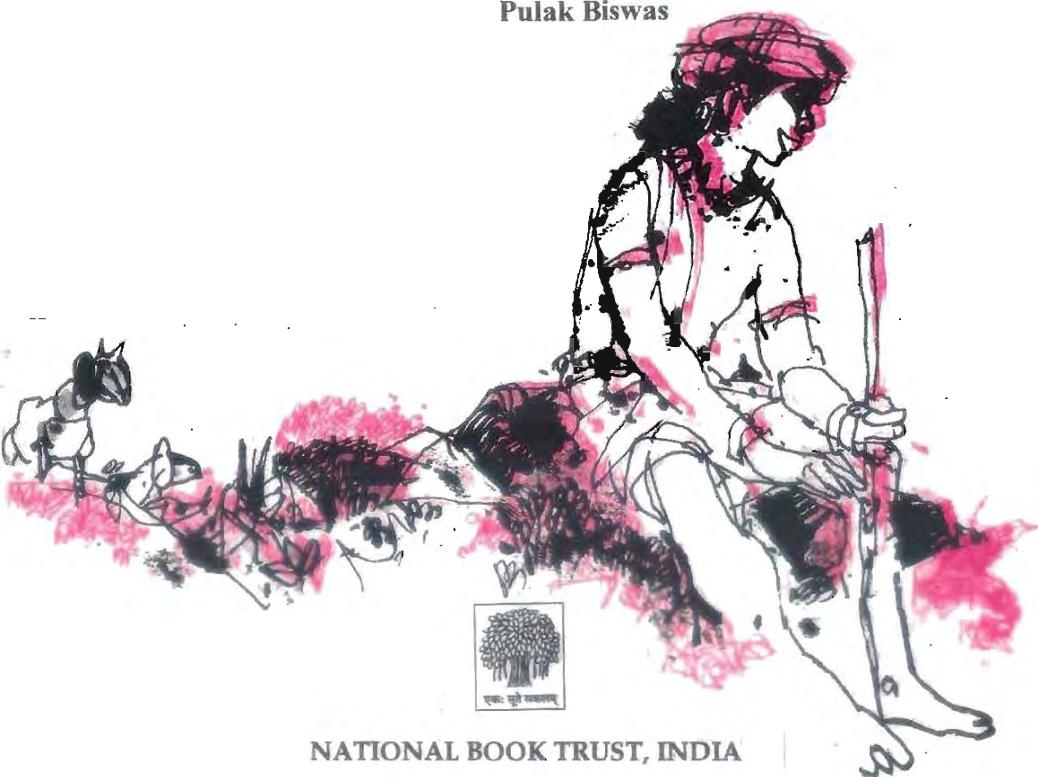
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Karla, a Great Buddhist Monastery

JIMUT AND THE MONKS AT KARLA

Nearly 2000 years ago, in the shadow of the great hill of the Western Ghats now called Karla, lay the village of Valuraka at the foot of the climb to the Karla Caves.

The Deccan was thickly forested then and wild animals prowled close to the homes of men. The forest villages prospered in the days of the great Satavahana dynasty, for strong kings maintained peace and order.

In this rugged country there were no great roads as in the plains of North India. Hill after hill rose in steps or ghats, that fell steeply to lower levels. But there were a few paths,



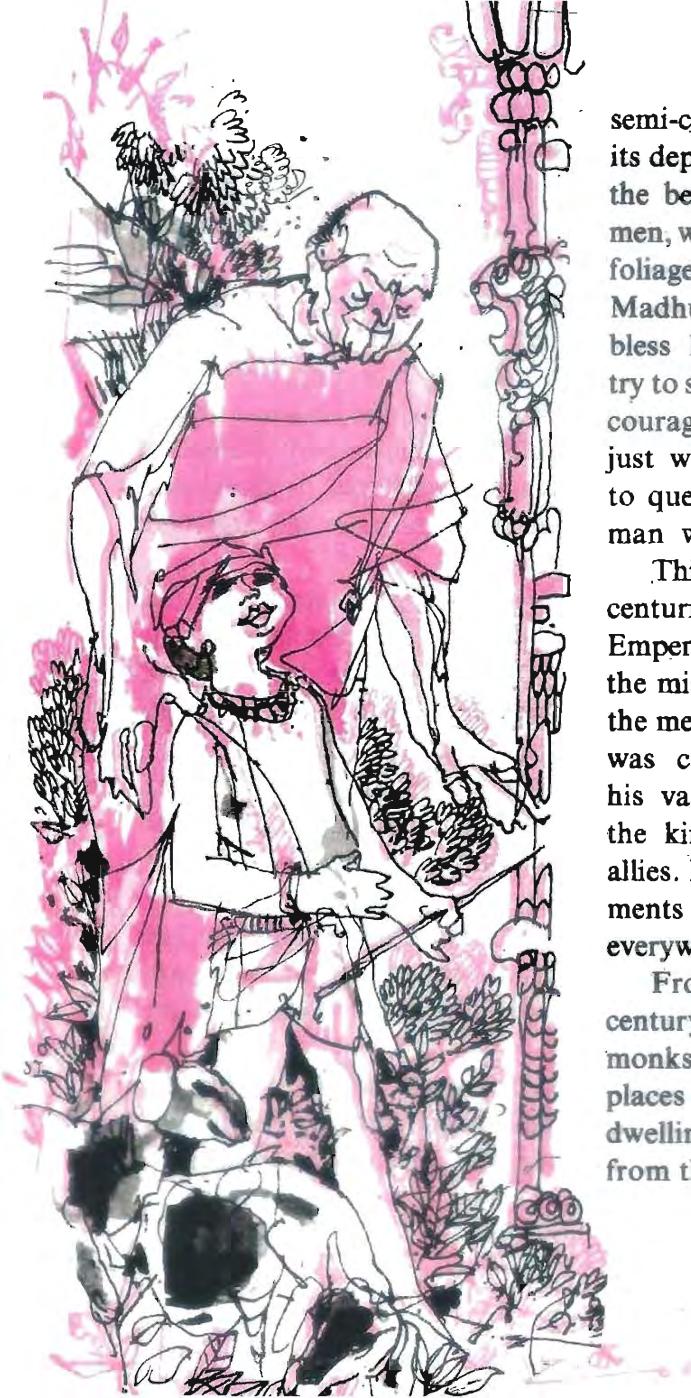
up and down which pack animals carried goods.

Jimut, the little goatherd, lived in this village below Karla in the second century A.D. The village huts were made of mud and wattle, and the people were hardy and were happy as long as the rulers gave them protection both from attacking enemies and grasping officials.

Jimut's life, however, was hard. He was an orphan, and lived with his uncle and aunt in a hut on the outskirts of the village. His uncle's patches of cultivation did not thrive and his mainstay was a small flock of goats. His aunt was ill-tempered and she often treated Jimut harshly. Because of his quarrelsome ways, his uncle Kalha had no share in the lower pastures. So every day, at dawn, Jimut took the flock up to the scanty pastures on the hill with a piece of black *bajri* bread for his day's food, and he returned at sunset.

As Jimut made his way up the steep hillside, he usually stopped for a while on a plateau half-way up. Here, on a broad flat ledge, there was a Buddhist cave monastery and settlement, which had been there for nearly 300 years. Jimut loved to gaze at the stately pillars leading into the main cave, and the beautiful triple-arch at the entrance. Along the paths and in the caves moved or sat motionless saffron-robed figures, with close-cropped hair, chanting in hushed voices or absorbed in meditation. Sometimes he could hear the words of their chant, "The Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, these are my refuge."

Among the worshippers, one very old monk often patted Jimut and gave him his blessing. Jimut longed to know the meaning of the scene before him : the vast dark hall, the great



semi-circular mound in its depths, the tall pillars, the beautiful carvings of men, women, animals and foliage. As old Monk Madhusudan stopped to bless him, Jimut would try to summon up enough courage to ask him. But just when he was about to question him, the old man would move on.

This was nearly four centuries after the great Emperor Asoka. Through the missions he had sent, the message of Buddhism was carried throughout his vast empire, and to the kings who were his allies. Buddhist establishments had sprung up everywhere.

From the second century B.C. Buddhist monks hollowed out places of worship and dwellings round them from the face of hills and

gorges. Each cave settlement centred round the *Chaitya* or Hall of Worship, in which stood the stupa with some relic of the Buddha buried deep within. One of the most beautiful and prosperous of the Deccan Buddhist settlements was the one at Karla.

These hillside settlements were a shrine where people worshipped, a monastery where the monks lived, and also a college where the Buddhist teaching was maintained and passed on. Each elder monk or *thera* was the guru to a group of younger monks, whose studies he supervised. Religious and philosophical discussions were conducted by the senior monks in the *viharas* or great assembly halls and attended by both residents and visitors.

The hillside monasteries were in close contact with the village people in the plain below. Pious people went up frequently to worship at the shrine. On feast days rows of little lamps lit up the settlement, and people went up all day and night with their offerings.

Jimut led a lonely life. His aunt and uncle were not popular, because they were so quarrelsome; and besides Jimut was out from dawn to dusk with his goats. So his playmates were the hills and rocks.

One evening when his uncle was sitting outside the hut talking to some villagers, Jimut asked, "Tata, who are those priests in yellow robes who live in the stone house on the hillside?"

"They are beggars," said his uncle sourly. "They do nothing all day, and they come round begging for food."

"The *bhikshus* are not beggars," protested an elder of

the village. "They live in poverty and they do not ask for food. It is true that a young monk comes down daily to the village and goes round with his bowl; but he does not ask for anything. Devout people are glad to set aside a share of their meal for the monks' bowl."

"They have grain and oil in their store-houses," said Kalha.

"Yes," said the elder. "Kings and nobles have assigned villages whose produce goes to the monastery. Donors have contributed pillars, arches, water-cisterns and other parts of the cave dwellings."

"The good monks care for the sick and bring them remedies from their herb gardens," said another man.



Still another added, "Once when my cow had strayed and I was looking for it, the monks helped me find it."

"And when the harvest failed some years ago," added another, "the monks gave grain and helped many families to keep alive."

"And at other times whom does the grain in their store-house feed?" asked Kalha resentfully.

"It feeds the monks and their guests—travellers, pilgrims and students who come to visit and learn from them," said the elder. "Because the monks do good work, people are anxious to supply their needs; and they have few needs."

"Just look at the great stone house, and its carvings of richly dressed people," said the grumbler.

"The *Chaitya* cave is indeed beautiful," said a stone-worker. "That is as it should be, for the stupa contains a hair of the Enlightened One.

"The richly dressed figures carved outside with their hair done elaborately are donors or the parents of donors. The monks themselves are simple men, close-shaven and dressed in saffron robes. And their cells are as simple as their dress. On the side of the hill you have seen the rows of cells where they sleep; there are single cells and some double cells where a guru may sleep attended by his *shishya*. Then there are dormitory cells for the younger monks and for guests. The bed is a narrow ledge in the rock with a stone head-rest."

Jimut listened eagerly. Suddenly his aunt called out angrily, "Lazy one! You play all day and now you sit up to listen to the conversation of grown-ups. Tomorrow you will be late taking the goats to pasture." And as Jimut



slunk past her, she slapped him.

Day after day, Jimut took the goats to the hilltop. As he passed the monastery he longed to talk to the monks but he never got a chance to do so.

One day, however, he took up the goats much later than usual, for his uncle was ill and he had been looking after him. As he left the hut, he saw a tall young monk walking along holding out his bowl, asking for nothing but thanking those who gave him something.

This was Monk Anand, who had just come from the hill monastery at Trirashmi (Nasik), to complete his studies at Karla.

The young monk held out his bowl silently, and the villagers put in a share of what they had. Some housewives

put in handfuls of rice; others gave curds wrapped in a leaf. Jimut had only a coarse black *bajri roti* for the whole day. But he longed to give something, so he put in half of his *roti*. The monk smiled and thanked him.

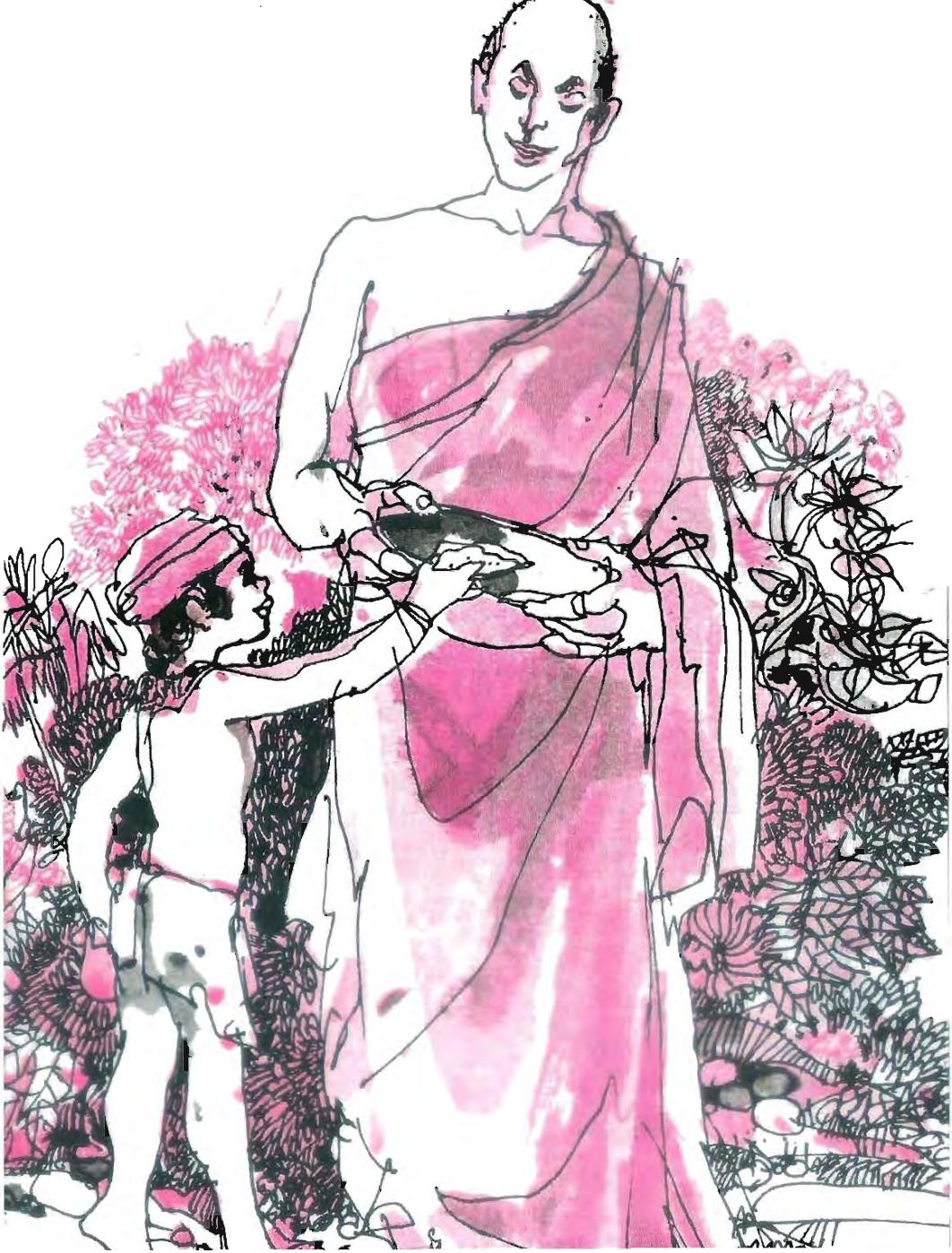
Jimut decided to share his food daily with the monks. He said, "I would be honoured to give daily to the monks' bowl, but I leave the house at dawn. If there was a bowl left by the pillar, I would put in the food on my way."

Monk Anand did not want to take anything from the lad's meagre meal but he did not want to disappoint him. "We will ask Monk Madhusudan," he said.

Later he consulted the old monk who said, "We will find a way. We must not discourage the child's desire to give."

When Jimut came up a few mornings later, he found the two monks waiting for him. "We are very grateful to you for wanting to help the community," said the old monk gravely. "The bowl will be left here every seventh day, when we have visitors and need more food. I will show you how to divide your food. Break your bread into two. Take one part and break it into three, like this, and put one of the three bits







into the bowl."

"But that is just a very small bit, Sir," said Jimut.

"Little gifts given with love are the gifts most acceptable to the great Lord Buddha. And many small gifts make big gifts in the end. Look at this great stone house. Many givers, rich and poor, have made gifts through the years; and so we have this beautiful hall of worship for the great Lord Buddha."

"Now you must go," the old monk said with a smile. "Some day Monk Anand will tell you about the great Lord Buddha and his message to mankind."

THE BEAUTIFUL HOUSE OF STONE

Then for a few days the monks did not see the little boy. The elder's wife told Monk Anand that Jimut had high fever. So he took leaves and herbal remedies for the sick child and in a week Jimut was well again.

Jimut's friendship with Monk Anand had been strengthened by his illness. Now Jimut eagerly asked question after question.

At the entrance to the *Chaitya* cave stood a tall pillar with four great beasts at the top. "What are these animals, Sir?" he asked Anand.

"These are *simha* (lions). We find them in the north," said Anand. "They are sometimes carved on the heads of tall pillars. The inscription on the pillar reads: 'This great pillar was donated by Agnimittanaka, son of Goti, a Maharithi!'"

"Did he stay here and build it?" asked Jimut.

"No," said Anand smiling. "The caves have been built by gifts from people; kings and nobles, merchants and craftsmen, basket-makers and ploughmen have all helped. And the work is done by our skilled stonemasons."

"Could I do it, Sir?" asked Jimut shyly.

"There are guilds of workmen for different kinds of work," Anand explained. "A worker has to attain great skill before he can be accepted into the guild."

At the back of the pillar was the carving of a man and a woman. Anand said, "Those are Devpal and his wife, Kshama. They live in Karjak. They have given a lot of land

to the monastery, so these images are carved in memory of them.

“From these lands we get grain for the monastery and its guests. A monk needs only a yellow robe and simple food. Kind donors provide our needs, so that we can give all our time to learning and teaching the Dharma. Sometimes the sale of the produce of the land pays for the oil for lamps for the monastery.

“Come in and look at the fifth pillar from the left. It says here: ‘This pillar is the gift of Dhamma Yavana from Dhenukakata.’ The third pillar and others too are gifts from Yavanas who come from distant lands.”

Old Monk Madhusudan said, “The beautiful peepal arch is in memory of the peepal tree under which Buddha sat when he attained wisdom. All who enter the cave under it must come seeking truth and wisdom. If you have no time to enter, stand under the peepal arch and recite these words: ‘Om Mani, Padme Om: Buddha is on his lotus throne.’ Then Buddha’s peace will be with you. When in pain or trouble Buddha’s peace will remain with you, the pain will disappear or become more bearable.”

Monk Anand also told Jimut about the great Emperor Asoka who, victorious in war, had given it up after seeing the pain it inflicted. Asoka had spread Lord Buddha’s message far and wide and thus Buddha’s teachings had come to Middle India.

Anand told Jimut of other cave monasteries among the hills of Western India, of the monastery of Bhaja not far from Karla, and of the monastic establishment at Nasik.



He told Jimut that the influence of the Wise One had been such that rulers all over the country, holding different beliefs, respected and helped the monks of the yellow robe. He told of the foreign ruler, Ushvadatta, son-in-law of the

Saka Satrap, Naphana, whose inscriptions both at Nasik and Karla showed that he gave gifts to both Brahmans and Buddhists; among other things he had given cows to the Brahmans and a plantation of 800 coconut palms for the maintenance of a Buddhist cave at Nasik. Both at Karla and Nasik were inscriptions telling how the Satakarni rulers, who had succeeded the foreign Saka Kshatrapas or viceroys, had confirmed and improved the gifts made by those earlier rulers. Above the door frieze was an inscription that said how King Gotamiputra confirmed a gift of the village of Karajaka, made to the monks by former rulers.

Poor people also wanted to give gifts to the monks. Anand pointed out the stone belt at the base of the arch. This was donated by the nun, Ashadhamita, who must have collected donations for it from many humble donors.

A rich *seth* (merchant) whose name figured in the inscriptions was Bhutapala, who had donated two beautiful five-storeyed friezes carved in relief at both sides of the entrance. Jimut was curious about the Yavana merchants who often came by sea from lands far to the west. Anand told him that long ago they had come by land with a young conqueror, Sikander, but they had gone back later. Now they came as peaceful traders and were greatly interested in Buddha's teaching.

Jimut noticed that many of the donors, Yavanas, and others—Simhadatta, the perfume-seller and Samina, the carpenter—came from Dhenukakata; he counted fourteen in all. It was wonderful to think how many people loved the Lord Buddha and his monks.

THE LEOPARD AND THE GOAT

One evening, after Jimut had assembled his flock, he discovered that one goat was missing. It was a black billy goat and his uncle would never forgive him if it was lost.

It was getting dark, so Jimut decided to get the flock home and creep out later to find the missing goat.

On the way, he passed an old monk who said, "Hurry home, the villagers have brought news of a leopard."

Jimut thought mournfully, "I must go back again, leopard or no leopard." And as soon as everyone was asleep he set off up the hillside.



As Jimut climbed up he wept softly, for he was tired and frightened. Then he remembered Monk Mañhusudan's advice that when in trouble, he should repeat the words, 'Buddha is on his lotus throne'. Now he was no longer afraid.

He trudged still higher. At last he heard a faint bleat and found the goat on top of a rock.

The goat bleated joyfully. Then suddenly the bleating was filled with fear. Jimut turned round. Two green eyes gleamed in the night, and a dark form approached, crouch-



ing close to the ground. It was a leopard!

Jimut immediately whirled his big stick and shouted to scare the animal off.

Jimut was never quite clear what happened next. Apparently the leopard leapt at the goat, misjudged the distance and fell back on the rocky ground below. The scared goat fell off the rock. And Jimut, accidentally knocked down by the leopard, fell with it, the leopard's jaws not far from his face.

Jimut felt the leopard's hot breath on his face. He mur



mured, "Om Mani, Padme Om; Buddha is on his lotus throne." Suddenly the leopard's body writhed and stiffened. The leopard was dead. It had broken its back on the rock. Exhausted by the night's adventure Jimut fell asleep against the leopard's body, clutching the goat to him.

The sky turned from black to iron-grey, an early bird chirped sleepily, and Jimut awoke.

Jimut trudged homeward with the goat, which had broken a leg, on his shoulders. At the outskirts of the village he met his uncle and a band of villagers who had been searching for him. The men lifted the goat off the boy's shoulders. "My finest goat with a broken leg!" shouted Kalha, and rushed at Jimut with his stick raised.

A village elder stopped him. "You have ill-treated this child long enough. Now we shall let the monks look after him."

They carried the exhausted child to Monk Madhusudan. "My strength held out, Sir," Jimut whispered, "because I had the Buddha's name on my lips. Just as the leopard's jaws were closing on me, it fell dead. Indeed the Buddha's favour was with me."

The old monk smiled at the boy. "You have much to learn about the wisdom of the Buddha, but you are worthy to learn it," he said.

And from that day Jimut's whole life changed, for now he worked for the monks and learnt the wisdom of the Buddha.

At the Workshops of Mathura

RETURN OF THE WANDERER

It was a bright sunlit day in the city of Mathura in the days of the Kushan Empire, about the middle of the second century A.D. The artisans' quarter, with its narrow streets and small crowded houses, was full of activity. The city of Mathura was several centuries old, and it was flourishing under the rule of the Kushans.

At the door of a small cottage-workshop, Ketaki watched the last of the light. Behind her, in the room that was workshop, living-room and bedroom combined, her old father-in-law fingered a piece of the famous red sandstone of Mathura. Her husband would soon be back from the yard where he, with other stone-carvers, worked on the statues, plaques and bigger pieces of sculpture of red, pink and spotted sandstone.

At last her husband returned. "Still waiting for that good-for-nothing! And tomorrow you will go to the temple to pray for his return!" he said angrily.

"I shall pray for his welfare and for his return," she said, "just as I pray for you, your father, and your other sons."

"The others are good lads. They are employed in the quarries and in the stonemasons' yard."

As she put down his *thali* before him, with rice, curds and gourd vegetables in small bowls of light metal and clay, the old man nodded. "Yes, they are good lads. But there was something special about Marchi. I remember how well he

carved a monkey-bone when he was only nine. And how his eyes shone as he asked me questions!"

"Look where his bright eyes have taken him! He talked too much to the garland-maker's daughter and when I beat him, he ran away with a Saka horse-dealer. He has been gone twelve years. Who knows where he is now," snapped the man.

Night fell and the quarter was quiet and dark, for people had little oil to spare for lights.

The next day Ketaki went to the wayside shrine with a slim young girl, the neighbour's daughter. She was Ketaki's choice for her son when he returned.

Meanwhile a caravan was approaching Mathura. One of the travellers grew impatient and hurried ahead. Surely, nowhere else were there such large *neem* and *kadamba* trees or so many green parrots as in Mathura.

Suddenly he saw his mother, still straight and tall as he remembered her. Just then Ketaki turned and saw him. "So you recognized me?" he said.

"What did you expect?" she answered. "Now let us hasten home."

"And suppose Father drives me out?" said Marchi.

"Your father's words may be hasty, but I know he longs for your return," she answered. Then turning to her companion she said, "Little one, go home till I can claim you."

Mother and son washed and talked at the well in the courtyard round which the cottages stood.

When Ketaki entered with her son, the father's face lit up for an instant. "So you have come back," he said gruffly.



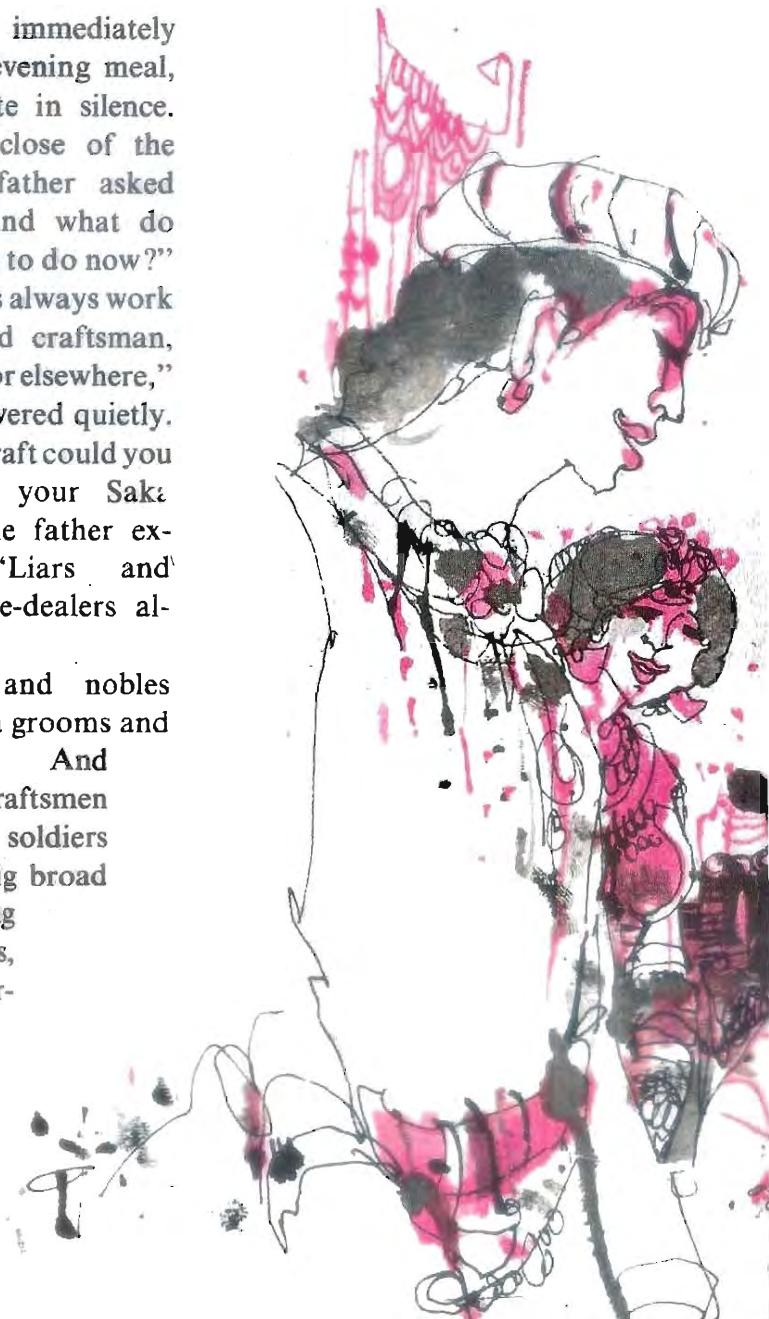
Ketaki immediately served the evening meal, and they ate in silence.

At the close of the meal, the father asked sharply, "And what do you propose to do now?"

"There is always work for a skilled craftsman, at Mathura or elsewhere," Marchi answered quietly.

"What craft could you learn from your Saka friends?" the father exclaimed. "Liars and thieves, horse-dealers always are!"

"Kings and nobles employ Saka grooms and guards. And Mathura craftsmen carve Saka soldiers with their big broad faces, long heavy swords, thick nor-



thern clothing and padded horseman's boots. And you know we have had Saka rulers. Our present rulers, the Kushans, look rather like the Sakas."

"As long as the rulers do not tax us heavily, and their soldiers do not prey on us, what do I care who rules us! But why should a Mathura carver keep company with horse-dealers?"

"A Saka horse-dealer is a good travelling companion. Few dare attack him with his grooms and his wild kicking horses. But since I parted from the horse-dealer, I have travelled with merchants. They travel in large groups with an experienced caravan-leader, and they often employ armed



escorts to guard them. They tell tales of many lands and their products. From the north comes soft warm cloth of goat's hair. Camel caravans cross desert and mountain from Tsin (China), bringing Tsinpatta, the fine cloth that is loved by the people far to the west. From the lands where the Yavanas dwell they bring jars of wine and beads of red coral for our nobles and rich merchants."

The grandfather intervened, "Did you see any of our products in the lands where you travelled?"

"Many," Marchi answered. "The Yavanas take away far more than they bring: brightly coloured cloth of many kinds, fine thin cotton and thick rich brocade with raised patterns, pearls, jewels, jewellery, perfumes, dyes, drugs, pepper, cinnamon, ivory and beautiful ivory work. At Kapisa (north of Kabul) where the Kushan rulers have their summer capital, I have seen intricate ivory work which was carved at Mathura.

"Most of all it was the sculpture of Mathura stone that I saw everywhere. From the Kabul river to our Yamuna, there is peace; and this empire has become an empire of trade, crafts and wealth. Now I must return to the caravanserai. Are there any odd pieces for me to carve? A monkey-bone or broken stone block?"

"Monkey-bone is cheap and there is a flawed block which we can afford to waste," said his father.

Darkness fell but mother and son talked by the water-pots under the stars far into the night.

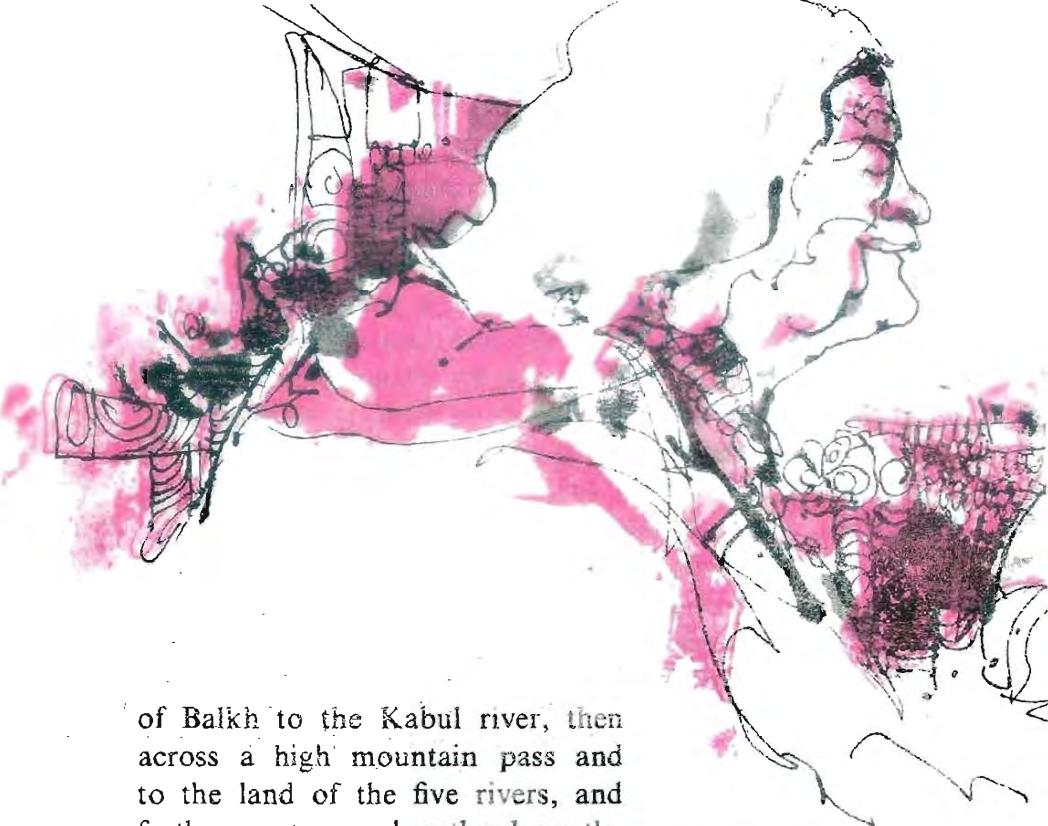
A WANDERER'S TALES

One evening, after the son's return from the caravan-serai, the old grandfather said eagerly, "Now we shall sit down to hear of my grandson's wanderings."

Marchi began, "Now that there is peace on the roads, not only merchants but monks and students also travel up and down the land. The students are learned men, who after studying in one university for seven years, go to another to learn for another seven. I have been to lands beyond the mountains from which some of these new rulers—Sakas, Pehelvis, Kushans—have come, one after another."

"Why do they come?" asked the grandfather.

"The lands beyond the snow-mountains are not rich and fertile like the valleys and plains of our great rivers," Marchi explained. "There are high mountains or cold deserts or else great rolling plains of grass that will only feed sheep. The tribes that live there wander out when the winters are very severe, or when hostile tribes attack. Some tribe comes down to lands like ours, which have rich cities and fertile fields. These nomads are often stronger than the people of the plains; but though they may defeat us they respect the wisdom of the thinkers of the plains. Yavanas, Sakas, Pehelvis and others came to the lands of the five rivers and then farther south and east. And so did the great Kushans. The finest statue of the great Kushan Emperor, Kanishka, was carved in Mathura. From the borders of Tsin in the east the Kushans wandered westwards to the borders of Iran. Then they turned southward and moved from the great river



of Balkh to the Kabul river, then across a high mountain pass and to the land of the five rivers, and farther on to our heartland on the Yamuna. The carver's hand has carved their history into their statues and their coins. The ruler has on the heavy padded boots of the wandering horsemen, a thick tunic such as the Pehelvis (Iranians) wear, and the pointed helmet of the Sakas. And the titles engraved on statues and coins reveal their travels. For the Emperor is entitled Maharaja and is also called Rajadhiraja (King of Kings), which is an Iranian title used by Parthian and Pehelvi rulers. And finally, he is called Devaputra (Son of Heaven),



which is the title they use in far-off Tsin. And all these titles are in Sanskrit, for both the Saka and the Kushan rulers use Sanskrit, the language of learned scholars."

"The sacred language of the Vedas," muttered the grandfather, "is known only to Brahmans and pandits."

"Now," continued Marchi, "it is the language used by the King's officials and poets. The King's proclamations and orders are all in Sanskrit. Emperor Kanishka is a great follower of the Buddha and is called the Second Asoka. He has built monasteries, and there are learned men and

poets at his court, and Mathura craftsmen flourish as never before. The workshops can hardly produce all the sculptures that are wanted of kings, nobles and rich merchants, as well as of Buddhas and Jain *tirthankaras*. The Brahmans too want images of the gods."

"But we were always told that one cannot drag to earth and sculpture the great teacher who has attained Nirvana. Only holy symbols stand for the episodes of the life of the Wise One," broke in the old man.

"That was so, Grandfather," said Marchi. "But now the great sage Nagarjuna who has come to stay in Dakshinapatha and others including Kanishka believe that men need to see the image of the Wise One in order to worship him. There are statues of Buddha everywhere in the distant places where I have travelled, at Takshashila, Purushpura and in Gandhara, and even in Mathura. Ashvagosha, a learned Brahman, was converted to the teaching of the Wise. One and then he converted the Emperor Kanishka. Now there are many followers of the Wise One and they advocate different paths to the truth. So Emperor Kanishka called a Council at Kanishkapura in the vale of Kashmir. Five hundred monks from all over the land attended, and Ashvagosha presided with a learned monk, Vasumitra. They discussed and formulated the teaching for all to know. Copies were engraved on copper-plates which have been buried under a great tower, so that even 1000 years hence, men may read them."

"But the teaching of great thinkers cannot be written down on copper or *talpatra*," interrupted the old man.

“Then how can it be preserved?” said Marchi.

“In the memory of learned men who pass it on from age to age,” replied the grandfather.

“But then it cannot be spread far and wide,” objected Marchi. “Now many feel that writing is more lasting and results in fewer quarrels and disagreements about the doctrines of the Faith.”

“Were there quarrels?” the old man asked.

“Indeed there were,” Marchi replied. “The main division is into two forms of belief. The monks of the south teach that the Wise One was a great teacher who attained Nirvana, and anyone who follows his teaching can free himself from the burden of life and rebirth. But now the monks of the north say that the Wise One was a divine being and we must worship him. The Emperor, who is a Northerner, favours the views of the second or Great Vehicle. So now we make images of the Buddha and of other Great Beings.”

“The *vihara* that the great Kushan Emperor, Kanishka, has erected at his capital Purushpura is a wonder to see,” Marchi continued. “It has a high tower of fourteen storeys. At the top is a mighty iron pinnacle, and that is surmounted by a number of umbrellas of copper, gilded over. Images of the Wise One adorn the sides.”

“We do not build like that,” said the father.

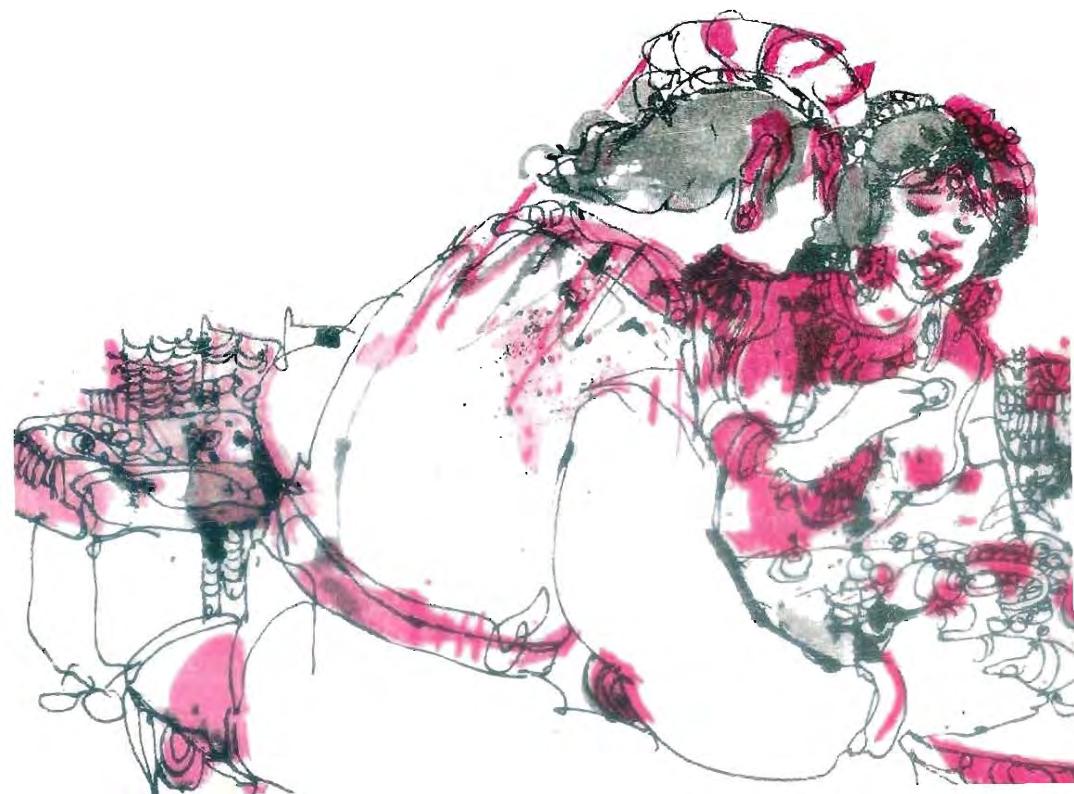
“The Emperor sometimes employs Yavana workmen,” Marchi explained. “A Yavana called Agesilos is overseer of this *vihara*.”

“And now we must all sleep,” said Ketaki. “Tomorrow evening you must show us what you have brought with you.”

SETTLING DOWN

When they sat down after supper the next evening, the young man showed them what he had brought during his travels. There was a bracelet of white shells and amber set in shining metal for his mother and a thick warm woollen rug with a curious design for his grandfather. "It is from Kashmir. Their mountain goats have long hair that is woven into the warmest woollen cloth," he explained.

Then Marchi brought out a gold coin that took their breath away. "How did you get this?" said the man. "It's copper coins and cowrie shells that we carvers are used to, and sometimes silver, but certainly not gold."



"It was given to me by a merchant when I saved his caravan from robbers. Look at the coin, Father; there is the King on one side in top-boots and horseman's coat, and on the other side is the figure of the Wise One with the name written in a strange script that they use far to the west."

The father turned it over and over in his hands. "It is a fine piece of craftsmanship," he said.

"I was told," said Marchi, "that these gold coins stamped with images of gods and kings come to us from a country far to the west (Rome), that trades with us. They buy spices, jewels, drugs and perfumes from us and silk from Tsin, and the goods go to them both by land and sea. They pay in fine
coins, which our rulers melt, re-stamp and issue again."



When Marchi produced a large chunk of ivory, his father exclaimed, "How could you afford it? A craftsman can rarely get a piece to work with."

"Merchants will readily provide ivory and payment for carving it to a good carver with a delicate and sure hand," Marchi explained. "There is great demand for our ivory work."

"Mathura stone is good enough for me," said the father.

"See what I have carved from that block you allowed me to use."

Carved in relief on the stone was a girl with long hair that she had washed and was wringing out; while a swan, with neck and beak raised, caught the drops of water as they dripped from the hair. There was no doubt about the carver's skill.

The father was delighted. "And now do you propose to stay in Mathura?" he asked.

"Do you want me to stay?" the son returned.

"I have found a wife for him," Ketaki intervened. "She is the daughter of our neighbour who works beside you in the carver's yard."

"Married to a girl of our own caste and working in Mathura workshops with the skill that you have, what more could I want?" said the father warmly.

"Well," said Marchi, "I have travelled long and far; I think I could promise to stay a long time before the desire for wandering seizes me again. And when I do go, I will always return."

Samudragupta's Whirlwind Campaign

SAMUDRAGUPTA AND THE GROOM'S SON

There was excitement in Pataliputra in the year 347 A.D., for Emperor Samudragupta was setting out on a new campaign.

For several centuries after the great Mauryas there had been constant fighting; then in 320 A.D. a new Chandragupta established his power in the Gangetic valley.

Chandragupta chose as his successor his son Samudragupta. By 347 A.D. Samudragupta had defeated the rajas of the Gangetic plain and ruled all Northern India from the Himalayas to the Narmada river. Now he was about to set out on a dangerous military expedition south of the Narmada into the Vindhya region of mountain and forest, where transport and communications would be difficult.

In the royal stables Samudragupta's favourite horse, Rakshas, who was obedient to his master's slightest touch, snorted and stamped. He could only be managed by two other people: his groom, Venu, who had groomed and fed him since he was a colt, and the groom's nine-year-old son, who had been brought up in the stables since he could crawl. Venu, however, had high fever, and the other grooms were trying to deal with the great horse, who reared and kicked as soon as they approached.

"Where is Venu's son, Ashwadatta?" the grooms asked one another.

"He must have been locked up by his mother for fear



that he would run away with the army," thought Suvarna, the old head-groom. And he set off for Venu's hut. Venu's wife was there with Venu's old mother.

"Where is Ashwadatta?"

"He is not here," they replied shortly.

"Tell Ashwadatta to come and say goodbye to Rakshas."

The old woman burst out, "You want to feed Ashwadatta to the tigers of the Vindhyan forest."

"Venu's son is as dear to me as my own child," Suvarna said and made a dignified exit.

As he left, the women looked at each other. "Tomorrow the Emperor will be gone and in the evening we can release Ashwadatta."

That evening the Emperor was told that Rakshas would not be available for the campaign.

Samudragupta proceeded to the stable. Rakshas ran out to meet him; but the moment the grooms approached, the horse reared and kicked like a demon. "This won't do," said the Emperor. "Someone must be found to manage the horse."

Then a shrill little voice spoke, "I will look after him," and a dirty, messy, half-naked child appeared. The horse whinnied and ran to him and the child patted him confidently.



“Who are you?” the Emperor asked.

Suvarna answered, “It is Venu’s son, Lord.”

“My grandmother locked me up. But I have a right to go with my Emperor, if my Emperor’s horse needs me. So I made a hole in the fence and escaped,” said Ashwadatta.

“We certainly need you,” said the Emperor, smiling. “But we must get your grandmother’s and mother’s permission. Let us ask them immediately.”

Suvarna hastened to fetch the women. “Why did you prevent this boy from accompanying his King?” Samudragupta asked.

The grandmother spoke up boldly, “Great King, Ashwadatta is only nine years old. He wants to go with you. But as your Majesty loves and honours your revered mother, the Maharani Kumaradevi, so should this child obey his old grandparent.”

The Emperor greatly honoured the lady of the ancient and powerful Lichchavi clan, whose marriage with his father had strengthened Chandragupta’s claim to Magadha. He said, “Give me your permission to take the boy. Suvarna will look after him.”

“Will you swear to bring him back alive and unhurt?” said the grandmother.

“I will look after him as I would look after my own child,” said Suvarna.

So Ashwadatta was hastily made ready for the morning’s departure. He was so excited he hardly remembered to say goodbye.

THE CAMPAIGN

Thus it was that Ashwadatta accompanied Samudragupta's military campaign in Central and Southern India. Suvarna kept his promise to look after Ashwadatta, and the little boy was fed from the Emperor's own field-kitchens. To the south of the Narmada, the forest became thicker and the ground rugged. The King's troops now had a diet of *bajra*, jungle fruits and game—hare, partridge, quail and pea-fowl.

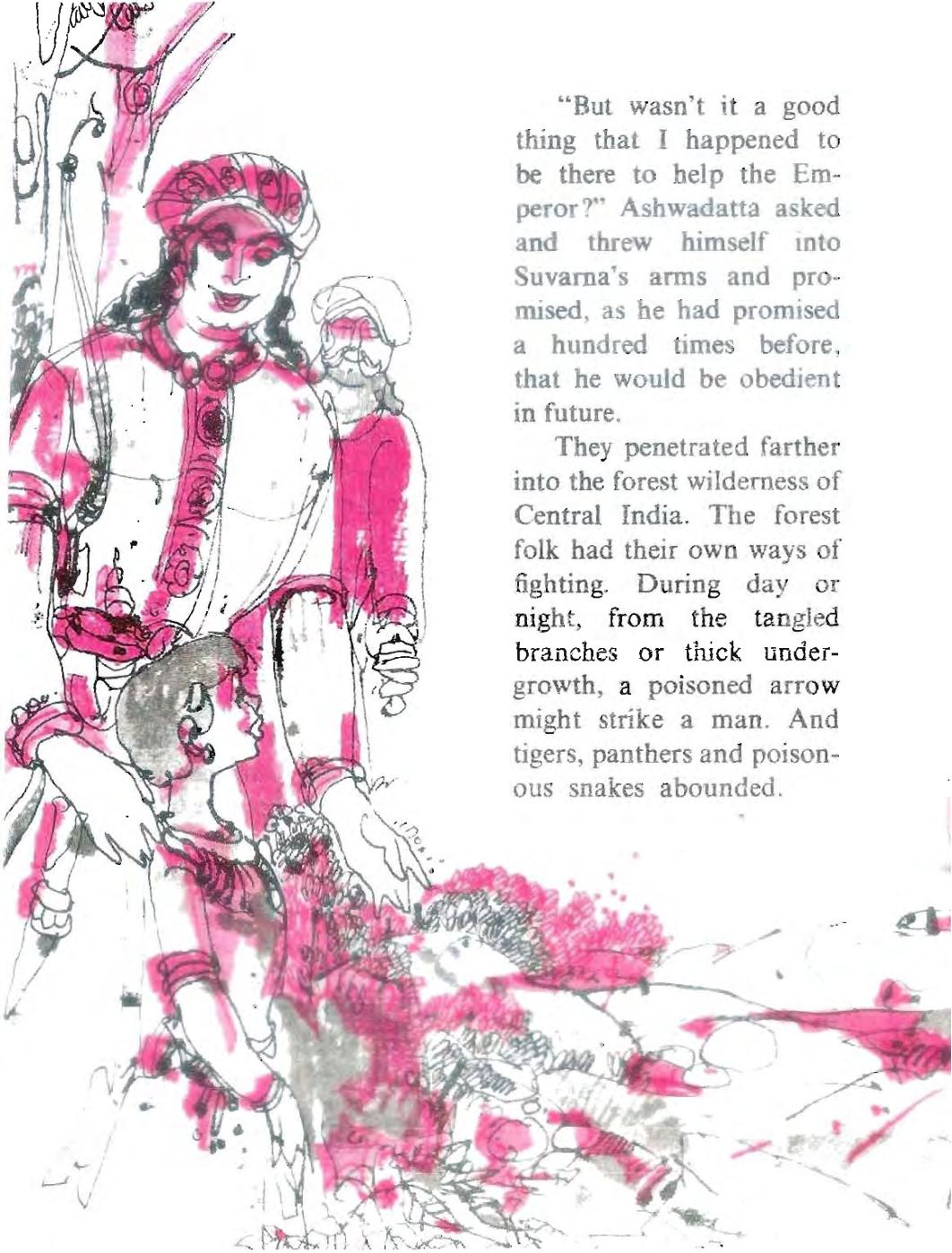
The Emperor often went off alone at dawn to perform his morning devotions. He laid aside his belt with its weapons while he prayed. Ashwadatta would set off too to lay in a stock of tamarind, green mango or whatever wild fruit was in season.

One morning, as the Emperor stood facing the East, he glimpsed a striped beast about to spring. Suddenly a bow and arrow were pushed into his hand. It was Ashwadatta, who had been on a mango-tree and had noticed the tiger.

The Emperor's arrow struck the tiger in the neck. The great beast rolled on its back, mortally wounded. The attendants rushed up; but Ashwadatta had already snatched up a hunting knife and plunged it with all his strength. The tiger collapsed and lay still.

"A good stroke!" said the King. Now everyone crowded around and praised the King's shot but the Emperor said, "It is to this little lad that the credit is due."

When Ashwadatta returned, Suvarna's face was as black as thunder. "How many times have I told you not to go into the forest alone?" he said.



"But wasn't it a good thing that I happened to be there to help the Emperor?" Ashwadatta asked and threw himself into Suvarna's arms and promised, as he had promised a hundred times before, that he would be obedient in future.

They penetrated farther into the forest wilderness of Central India. The forest folk had their own ways of fighting. During day or night, from the tangled branches or thick undergrowth, a poisoned arrow might strike a man. And tigers, panthers and poisonous snakes abounded.

Nevertheless the Emperor's armies advanced, and chief after chief made his submission till all the kings of the Vindhya region and the valleys of the Mahanadi, the Godavari and the Krishna were conquered.

In the kingdom of Vyaghra-Raja, the Tiger-King, Suvarna was killed by a poisoned arrow shot from a thicket in the jungle.

Now Ashwadatta could not eat, and his sleep was disturbed by nightmares. He became so thin and pale that the Emperor noticed it. "You must not fret," he said. "Who will look after Rakshas if you fall ill? You shall sleep in my antechamber."

Ashwadatta did not have nightmares that night, nor the following nights. As he slept in the outer porch of the King's 'travelling-palace' of branches and reeds, he heard the sweetest music. It came from the King's large inner room, so he crept to the partition of branches and lay there listening. Suddenly the point of a lance touched him and a hoarse voice said, "A rat, a rat! How did he creep in here?"



Ashwadatta was frightened but he answered boldly, "I am Ashwadatta, the Emperor's horse's groom. I was only listening to the sweet music."

"How dare you listen to the King playing? It is death for anyone who pries on the King," the voice threatened.

Another voice intervened, "Our King is a king of musicians, so it is no wonder that the lad is drawn to his music." Ashwadatta recognized the Emperor's close friend, the courtier-scholar-warrior, Pandit Harisena. Then Pandit Harisena, who was expected by the Emperor, went in. He told the Emperor the story and took the boy in.

The Emperor was wearing loose cotton





garments and was sitting on a high-backed couch with a veena in his hands. He smiled. "Let Ashwadatta's couch be made close outside my room and let him fall asleep every night to the strains of the veena."

Now Ashwadatta had glimpses of the Emperor's inner circle, and of a world of art and scholarship. For the great Emperor was warrior, poet, musician and scholar all in one.

Then they passed through city states, with an urban civilisation of their own, and advanced southward by the east coast road, and for the first time Ashwadatta saw the open sea.

Besides Rakshas, another magnificent horse accompanied them but without a rider. This was the horse of the *Yagna*—the old horse sacrifice. All the lands through which the horse passed had to acknowledge Samudragupta as overlord—*Chakravarti* of the countries through which the *chakra* (wheel) of his power rolled during the great campaign. When they returned to Pataliputra, the horse would be sacrificed at the altar. Ashwadatta made friends with it, and fed it titbits.

So they passed through the kingdom of Vengi between the Krishna and the Godavari. At the ancient city of Kanchi, capital and famous seat of learning, a great durbar was held where the Emperor received tribute from the kings of the south. And envoys were also sent by King Meghavarna of Lanka (Ceylon), with a casket of jewels.

THE RETURN

At last, the army made its way home through the Western Deccan and the land that is now known as Maharashtra. They had been away for three years, with the Emperor always at the fore-front in the fighting, at the hunt and in the councils of war. At night there were religious discussions, poetry recitals and music. And there were durbars where he received the homage and tribute of kings.

It was a very different Ashwadatta who returned home—taller, stronger, no longer mischievous, and full of the adventures of the campaign.

Now Pataliputra was crowded with Brahmans and others who had come for the Horse Sacrifice. This rite had been performed in epic times by King Yuddhisthira, Dharmaraj of the Mahabharata.

During the campaign Ashwadatta had become very fond of the magnificent steed. He stole off on the last night to caress it and bid it goodbye. The next day, decorated with garlands and flowers, it was sacrificed at the altar. Gold coins had been struck as a memorial to be distributed among the Brahmans. One of these was given to Ashwadatta and he took it home to his parents to add to the small heap that he had already accumulated for them.

That night he and his parents looked at all the coins and Ashwadatta explained the inscriptions to them. "Such fine gold coins," he said, "have not been issued by previous rulers. They are called dinaars. Look at this new dinaar that I have brought you. It has on it the horse that was sacrificed

yesterday."

"Look," said his mother turning the coin over, "on this side is the figure of a lady."

"That is the Maharani Dattadevi, our King's wife," said Ashwadatta. "The words inscribed under are '*Ashwamedha Yagna*' (Horse Sacrifice). You see how the great Emperor wishes to honour the Maharani by associating her with his greatness."

"Look at this coin, Mother," Ashwadatta continued. "It shows our Emperor sitting with a veena in his hands. He is dressed in a loose *dhoti*; but he wears a head-dress studded with pearls, diamonds in his ears, and a most precious ornament on his arm. On the other side of the coin is the goddess Laxmi."

One day Buddhist envoys from King Meghavarna of Lanka came to Pataliputra with rich gifts and a request from their King to the Emperor. Buddhists from Ceylon, visiting the monastery built by the Emperor Asoka at Bodh Gaya, had complained that they could not get accommodation. So the King wanted permission to found a monastery for those on pilgrimage to the holy places of Buddhism. Permission was given, a site selected, and a splendid monastery erected. It was three storeys high and had six halls from which rose three towers, surrounded by a strong wall, thirty to forty feet high. Inside was a great statue of Lord Buddha, in gold and silver, studded with the precious gems for which Lanka was famous.

Ashwadatta's mother was surprised that so much favour was shown to Buddhism when the Emperor and his heir, the

Yuvraj, son of the Maharani Dattadevi, were all devotees of Vishnu. Then Ashwadatta told his parents of the high position occupied at the Gupta court by Pandit Vasubandhu, the great Buddhist scholar.

"But our Emperor's scholar friend," said his father, "is Pandit Harisena, who is a Brahman."

"Harisena is a great poet and scholar of Sanskrit, well-known at our court and in Pataliputra," said Ashwadatta. "But Pandit Vasubandhu is known far and wide. He has received invitations from Purushpura, from Lanka, and even from China. Moreover, our kings have always paid respect to all great religious teachers and given facilities to their followers."



Ashwadatta was now in high favour with the Emperor and went on many journeys with him. The last journey that he made during his father's life-time was to Prayag (Allahabad).

The Emperor Samudragupta was old now, and an account of the great King had recently been written by his friend, Pandit Harisena. It was a *Kavya* in praise of the King, in beautiful Sanskrit; and it was carved on an ancient pillar of polished stone that had already been standing for nearly five centuries at Kaushambi.

Ashwadatta gave his parents a summary of the *Kavya*—how it praised the King as warrior, musician, poet, and how it told of his campaigns east, north and south.

“How much you have learnt and how far you have travelled since the days when you first went with the Emperor and left us weeping!” said Ashwadatta’s mother. “You owe it all to Rakshas because he would not go without you.”

The Great Emperor Harsha

YOUNG HARSHA BECOMES KING OF KANOUJ

In the depths of the Vindhyan forest, three tall women sat in front of a funeral pyre, looking pale and miserable.

These women were different from the short, dark-skinned forest folk. The youngest especially had an appearance of royal dignity. She was Princess Rajyashri. Her father, the King of Thaneswar, had made his little state an important kingdom, and had helped to drive out the wild Hunas, who had ravaged the land since the days of the great Skanda Gupta.

The King had two sons, Rajyavardhana and Harsha. He had married his lovely daughter to the ruler of Kanouj, the city and kingdom that was beginning to take pride of place among the cities of Aryavarta.

Then a sudden Huna raid was reported from the north. The King sent an army under Prince Rajya, who was accompanied by Harsha, a lad of fifteen. On account of his youth, Harsha was left behind in the Himalayan foot-hills with a force of cavalry, while Prince Rajya went ahead. It was a region of plentiful game and Prince Harsha enjoyed himself.

Then news came that the King was dying. Harsha hastened to his father's bedside and swift camel riders took the news to Prince Rajya who had been wounded by the arrows of the fleeing Hunas. But one disaster followed another. The Raja of Western Malwa, taking advantage of the situation in Thaneswar, attacked Kanouj, killed the King and

threw Princess Rajyashri in prison.

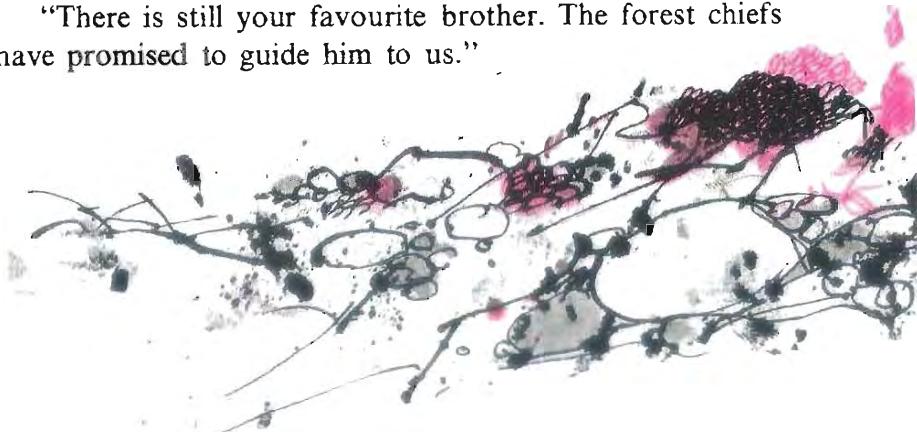
Prince Rajya rode out swiftly and defeated the King of Malwa. Unknown to her brother Rajyashri had meanwhile escaped with the help of a Gupta nobleman, and had then been guided by a Buddhist monk to the Vindhyan forest, where there was a Buddhist hermitage.

But troubles still pursued the young Vardhanas. The victorious Prince Rajya was called to a meeting by the seemingly friendly King Sasanka of Gauda (West Bengal), who was actually an ally of Malwa. The Prince went to the meeting without a single soldier, and was treacherously murdered.

So now everything depended on Harsha. He set off immediately to avenge his brother's death and rescue his sister.

The Princess meanwhile was in despair. Sick in body and spirit, she gathered wood for the funeral pyre on which she planned to burn herself. "Father, elder brother and husband dead, who will protect me and what should I live for?" said Rajyashri to her women.

"There is still your favourite brother. The forest chiefs have promised to guide him to us."





“He is so young, and his responsibilities are too great.”

The days passed, and no help came. At last, in despair, Rajyashri said, “Tomorrow I shall die. Let us spend the night in prayer. Then let the fire cleanse me and put an end to my sufferings.”

But fortune turned in favour of Princess Rajyashri at dawn. Harsha, who had travelled day and night, reached his sister just in time. As the women were about to mount the pyre—for her attendants had decided to die with her—Harsha snatched his sister from the flames.

“You have come, Harsha!” she cried. “But what can we do against the evil that threatens us on all sides? You always wanted to be a scholar, not a ruler.”

Harsha answered in a confident voice, “First let us thank the sun that our grandfather worshipped, the sun that brings us a new day and new life.” He looked at the young pandit who was with him. And the pandit sang a hymn of praise to the sun.

Then they returned, and Harsha ascended the thrones of Kanouj and Thaneswar, with the approval of the councillors and ministers of state. Some hesitated because of Harsha’s youth, but the old and experienced Senapati Simhananda urged his election. So started, in 606 A.D., the Harsha era.

GREAT DAYS AT KANOUJ

Thirty-five years later, King Harsha, his sister and the pandit were in a very different setting. They were in the royal city of Kanouj—a city with strong defences, bordered by the Ganga on the western side, and deep ditches with lofty towers rising at intervals on the other three sides. There were fine temples, Buddhist *viharas*, and private houses of brick and wood, with carvings and paintings.

Harsha was now lord of Aryavarta. Rajyashri, now a stately lady, sat by Harsha's side listening to scholars and taking part in their discussions. The King had always been interested in religion and different forms of worship, and in pageantry. So the pandit was busy conducting different functions.

The pandit was presenting a play, *Nagananda*, written by Harsha and based on an old Buddhist legend. After watching a performance, the pandit's son, Pundarika, discussed it with his friends, Vasubhuti and Ayam. Pundarika said, "Our Emperor is as great as Asoka, Samudragupta, and Chandragupta Vikramaditya. In *Nagananda*, he has described the hero, King Jimutavahana, in words that my father says apply perfectly to Harsha: 'One who is kind and peace-loving, one who likes to see good in others, one who is prepared to sacrifice himself for the welfare of the people'."

"But Pundu," Ayam said, "you say that our Harsha is like Asoka, who gave up war for peace, and also like Samudragupta, who subdued Uttarpatha and Dakshinapatha."

"And the King's army," added Vasubhuti, "which

consisted of 5000 elephants, 20,000 horsemen and 50,000 infantry, now consists of 60,000 elephants and 100,000 cavalry."

"Harsha had to fight to restore peace and order," said Pundarika. "Since the wild Hunas had destroyed the Gupta Empire, there was no strong overlord in Aryavarta,"

"For six years the soldiers never laid aside their weapons.



Then at last the kingdoms were all brought under one over-lord. Now King Harsha rules over the whole basin of the Ganga, including Nepal—from the Himalayas to the Narmada. Kings from far-away places obey his orders, from his friend the ruler of Kamarupa (Assam) in the extreme east to his son-in-law, the ruler of Valabhi in the west.”

Prabhakar Pandit overheard the boys. “But Emperor



Harsha prefers to devote his energies to the welfare of his subjects," he said. "There are rest-houses for travellers, and hospitals for men and animals. *Chaurodharikas* (thief-catchers) are appointed and the villages are given special protection at harvest time. The King travels often and enquires about the maintenance of order and safety in towns, villages and on the roads."

"How does the King spend his day?" asked Vasubhuti.

"A part of each day is devoted to affairs of state," the pandit explained. "The King sits with his council and receives messages from all parts of his dominions, and written orders are sent back. There is a whole department to convey messages, and the King's post is carried quickly on the backs of female camels.

"In his travelling-palace of boughs and reeds, he follows the same daily routine as in Kanouj. Otherwise he could never complete his numerous tasks."

"Then a part of the day is always given to works of charity," the pandit continued. "The King gives to the poor, to religious men, and to institutions of learning; and all this has to be planned and supervised. The royal kitchens daily feed a great number of Buddhist monks and Brahman priests."

Ayam intervened, "Why is the King so interested in the Buddhist teaching? That was not the worship of his ancestors."

"Our King's ancestors have worshipped many gods," said the pandit. "A distant ancestor worshipped Shiva above other gods. The King's father, Prabhakar Vardhana wor-

shipped Aditya, the sun, to whom he daily offered a bunch of red lotuses in a vessel set with red rubies. The Emperor Harsha has had temples erected to Shiva, to the sun and to the Buddha. He is a patron of the famous Buddhist university at Nalanda. And every five years the King arranges a great assembly, where scholars from distant countries meet, discuss, and exchange ideas."

"A great distribution of alms takes place at these assemblies, doesn't it?" said Vasubhuti.

"All the wealth that has accumulated in the King's personal treasury in the previous five years is given away to Buddhist monks, Brahman pandits, and the poor," said the pandit. "The King gives away his jewels and even his clothes so that he has had to borrow a garment from his sister; and the money from the royal robes and jewels is used by the monks to pay for the cost of copying sacred manuscripts."

"What about his other activities?" Vasubhuti asked.

"Another part of the day," said the pandit, "is given to literary discussions. Contests are held in poetry, where authors read their works aloud. King Harsha himself has written plays and a book of grammar. The King's great friend, Banabhatt, is a famous author." The busy pandit then hurried away.

"Father gave me a story by Banabhatt written on birch-bark," said Ayam. "His Sanskrit is very difficult to understand. He is now writing the life of King Harsha—*Harsha Charita*."

"Our King's language is beautiful and simple," said Vasubhuti. "I enjoyed reading *Nagananda* in which the

Boddhisatva, King Jimutavahana, saved the race of *naga* (cobras) from destruction by offering himself in their place to Vishnu's bird, Garuda, the deadly enemy of the whole race of snakes. Moreover, Harsha writes a beautiful hand."

"I should love to go to the great University of Nalanda," said Pundarika. "The library has three large buildings to house the thousands of manuscripts."

"I too would like to go to Nalanda," said Vasubhuti, "to see the great water-clock that sets the time for all Uttar-patha."

"I don't know if we could get in," said Pundarika. "A student at Nalanda is often already a scholar. The learned gate-keepers put questions to all who seek entrance; only two or three applicants out of every ten are admitted."

"But there are 5000 students in residence," said Vasubhuti.

"They are from all over India and from distant countries as well," said Pundarika, "from Lanka and far-off Yavadvipa and Suvarnadvipa (Java and Sumatra)."

"Even if you got admission, you would still have to pass the final examinations, Vasubhuti," said Ayam. "The successful scholars are taken through the town, loaded with garlands, seated on stately elephants. But I believe the unsuccessful ones have their faces blackened and are mounted on donkeys with their faces to the tail."

"Then neither Pundu nor I had better try to get to Nalanda!" said Vasubhuti.



THE RELIGIOUS ASSEMBLY AT KANOUJ

Prabhakar Pandit hurried by. The boys stopped him. "Tell us about Nalanda!"

"I have to arrange the reception of the foreign scholar, Yuan Chwang," said the pandit. "He went to Nalanda as a student and pilgrim. His fame as a scholar had preceded him, and Abbot Silabhadra gave him a great welcome. Two hundred monks in procession with banners, flowers and incense, brought him into the enclosure. A gong was sounded, and Yuan Chwang was invited to say at Nalanda and make free use of all he might need."

"Why has he left Nalanda?" asked Pundarika.

"The kings of the

north all wish to have at their courts so learned a guest," his father explained. "Before Yuan Chwang came to Nalanda, the ruler of Kashmir received him with great honour, conducting him down a road strewn with flowers and sprinkled with perfume. He stayed there for two years in a monastery to improve his Sanskrit. The King gave him the services of twenty scribes to make copies of the important Buddhist books to take back to China. Then he went from monastery to monastery before he came to Nalanda. Our Emperor and Bhaskara of Kamarupa wanted to hear him discourse on religious and philosophical topics. He refused, courteously but firmly, saying that he did not wish to interrupt his studies at Nalanda. Bhaskara got so angry that he threatened to burn down Nalanda. Since then, Yuan Chwang has been at Bhaskara's court. But when Harsha learnt that the Chinese scholar was staying with his vassal, Bhaskara received a message to send the learned priest at once. He replied that his lord could have his head, but not his guest. To this Harsha replied, 'We shall trouble you to send the head.' So Bhaskara came with the scholar. Our King received Yuan Chwang with much honour, and asked him to explain one of his works. The Emperor was so delighted with his discourse that he at once decided to hold a great religious debate, open to all scholars, to see if any could defeat the arguments of the Master of the Law, which is the title that the King has conferred on him.

"Preparations for the great assembly have already begun. Arrangements have been made to provide all the visitors with food and shelter. Several thousand Buddhist monks



have come, a thousand from Nalanda alone. Eighteen kings, who are Harsha's feudatory vassals, are here with their retinues, waiting to receive the Emperor. Bhaskara of Kamarupa and Dhruvasana of Valabhi are already with him.

"A vast enclosure will be made just outside the city, at the gate of which a tall tower will be erected. The foreign scholar will preside over the assembly; he will state his point of view and challenge all to disprove him."

When the great religious debate began, Pundarika was able to get himself and his friends into the enclosure. The challenges of the Master of the Law were written out in red on white cloth, and the pandit's son, knowing Sanskrit, was given charge of fixing them up over the high gate.

A gold image of the Buddha was raised on the top of a high tower. Under the tower were special seats, including that of Yuan Chwang.

The debate went on for four days. The pilgrim spoke clearly and put the case for Mahayana Buddhism so well that he convinced the Emperor and his sister.

The opponents, who could not equal the scholar's powers of persuasion, were angry and began complaining about him and criticising the Emperor. Even among the boys there was much argument.

"Nobody can oppose the foreign scholar because they are all afraid that Harsha will punish them," said Ayam.

"My father, the poet Banabhatt, and the ruler of Kamarupa himself, have not accepted Buddhism. They are all strict Brahmans," said Pundarika. "No honest opponent need fear punishment. Yuan Chwang is a true scholar, one who would gladly teach and equally gladly learn."

THE PILGRIM'S DEPARTURE

A year later, Yuan Chwang was ready to return home. The three boys came to say farewell and to ask for his blessings.

"Won't you stay on, Sir?" said Pundarika. "My father says the Emperor and King Bhaskara beg you to."

"Everyone has been very kind," said the scholar, "but I must take home the treasure I came to seek."



“The Emperor will load you with gifts when you return,” said Ayam. :

“A pilgrim wants no personal gifts,” the monk replied. “I am, however, taking back great treasure for my monastery and my people: over 650 Sanskrit manuscripts as well as precious relics and images of the Enlightened One.”

“Will you wait for a caravan, Sir?” asked Vasubhuti.

“No, I shall go alone as I came,” said the pilgrim. “But your kind rulers are giving me letters to the kings of the northern kingdoms written on fine white cotton cloth and sealed with the Emperor’s seal in red wax.”

“You will pay us another visit, Sir?” asked Vasubhuti. “I shall come from the end of the land to see you.”

“I have been away for fourteen years,” the monk replied. “I must devote the rest of my life to translating and explaining the books that I am taking back. But I shall always remember the warm welcome and friendship of the people from the Buddha’s homeland.”



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